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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a public library perspective on lifelong learning. The first section discusses the lifelong learning challenge, including the aims of the Australian National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning, and findings of a national survey related to the value of and barriers to learning. The second section addresses the issue of the public library as a lifelong learning institution, including the diversity of clientele, and Derbyshire (Australia) Learning and Technology Access services. The third section presents a lifelong learning project, titled "Lifelong Learning--The Key to Knowledge," that was organized by the City of Swan Public Libraries (Australia) for the International Year of Older Persons, including: anticipated outcomes; lecture series topics; and program evaluation, covering demographics, value of the program, awareness of aging and seniors, overall evaluation of the program, and effectiveness of promotional material and advertising. A program of events is appended. (MES)

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Lifelong Learning - A Public Library Perspective

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Proceedings

Lifelong Learning - A Public Library Perspective

Maureen Kahlert

Education is at the heart of both 'personal and community 'development; its mission to enable us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full'

1996 report of the UNESCO Task Force on Education for the Twenty-First Century

Introduction

The topic of Lifelong Learning has been addressed by many disciplines and in many different environments.

Indeed as Alan Bundy has stated 'Since the 1996 UNESCO Delors report *Learning: the treasure within,* lifelong learning has developed into what will be the educational policy icon of the early 21st century.' (Bundy, 1999, p95)

It has become associated with government policies 'encompassing quality of life, new opportunities, reskilling and equality of access'(Bundy, 1999, p95).

Indeed in 1996 the European Parliament declared the Year of Lifelong Learning. Since then policy initiatives on lifelong learning have been developed in thirteen industrialized nations. In Australia, university centres and chairs in lifelong learning have been established.

At the global level, learning is high on the agenda due to rising interest in social capital, the need for a competitive edge in the global and knowledge economy and changes in information and communication technology.

In America the concept of lifelong learning was conceived and developed in the 1970's in recognition of the need to approach learning, education, individual growth, and personal development as part of a holistic philosophy. The value of the concept was in its recognition of the cumulative effect of learning throughout the life span.

Fundamental and imperative to the entire lifelong learning process is information literacy that is the ability to access, retrieve, interpret and apply information in particular in electronic form.

Learning and lifelong learning contrast to lifelong education in so much as that they are much broader orientated concepts as they encompass stock that comes from living and life itself. Hence formal education, non formal education, social and recreational activities and just day to day living play a *process* role leading to the product of lifelong learning. Education facilitates lifelong learning however, lifelong education is the *business* and lifelong learning is the expected product we can expect within the *business*

Objectives

This paper has three main objectives:

- Discuss the Lifelong Learning challenge
- Address the issue of the public library as a lifelong learning institution
- Present a Lifelong Learning Project which was organised by the City of Swan Public Libraries for the International Year of Older Persons

What is Lifelong Learning?

What is lifelong learning? Lifelong learning is the gaining of knowledge through the life span from a variety of sources and learning opportunities.

Most people are continuously learning and gaining knowledge throughout their life span. As one ages it is common for some loss of immediate memory ability however there is little scientific support for the opinion that senility or a serious loss of intellectual capacity is normal due to ageing. When intellect does decline it is generally the result of specific disease or drug effects prescribed for ailments, terminal illnesses or of an isolated unstimulating way of life.

Hence every opportunity should be given to seniors to utilize the knowledge and information they have acquired over the course of a lifetime.

On the other hand, longitudinal studies do suggest a possible decline in learning ability after the age of 70. It is interesting to note that mental abilities which reflect past knowledge (crystallized intelligence) are maintained longer against the hazards of age than fluid intelligence (learning new material). A decline in intelligence can also result from isolation and lack of mental stimulation in one's life.

Knowledge can be gained from a variety of sources as stated by one of the Fryer Report task groups, working under the umbrella of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning:

' - .access to learning opportunities requires resources for self-directed and autonomous forms of learning as well as access to educational institutional progression routes and formal qualifications ' (Batt, 1998, p3)

Widespread social and economic change has resulted in the need for communities to engage in more learning and at more stages in their life.

A recent report titled 'National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning' was produced for the Australian National Training Authority by the National Marketing Strategy consulting team on behalf of MINCO. This publication will be the Vocational Education and Training's blueprint for turning the Australian community and enterprises on to lifelong learning.

'A Bridge to the Future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998-2003' emphasized the need to establish a training culture, through effective marketing analyses and responses.

This need was raised in a ministerial paper in the form of a question -'how can we move from a country with a soundly structure (vocational education and training) system to a country which instinctively values education and training and turns to it instinctively and intuitively in a process of lifelong learning?' In essence the objective was to stimulate a passion for learning and the acquisition of new skills among Australians.

It was the objective of The National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning to answer this question using social marketing approaches. Indeed there were two major aims:

- To instill within the Australian community and enterprises a desire to acquire skills that are valued and to engage in lifelong learning (primary aim).
- To create a framework for effective marketing of skills and lifelong learning products and services (secondary aim).

(Australian National Training Authority, 1999, p1)

How was this achieved? A national survey was conducted of people aged 16 and over followed by a national qualitative research program of 31 focus groups. The findings of the quantitative survey allowed the marketing team to divide the general community into main attitudinal 'types' or 'segments' This resulted in an analysis of each segment's knowledge, attitudes, perception, barriers

and incentive related to the acquisition of skills and lifelong learning.

The definition for learning used in the research covered informal learning, training and study.

The rationale for this was due to the findings from the community responses during the qualitative research.

For the community informal, unstructured or incidental/experiential learning were the preferred categories for learning indeed reactions to 'study' per se were very negative.

This definition of learning for the community was clearly the most appropriate means of talking about lifelong learning to Australians.

The results and picture that emerged is both enlightening and challenging. Some fundamental findings were:

'Customers have revealed a value for learning that is complex and holisitic:

- We value learning for its whole of life contribution - to work, family, community and personal growth; it contributes to our happiness and well being.
- The external benefits of learning are important but so is its intrinsic value - we believe that learning anything is worthwhile.
- Few of believe that learning is only about qualifications or vocational skills, and some of us challenge the idea that work provides the most important reason to learn.
- Most of us are confident that learning could help us to achieve our life goals or to keep up with the rapidly changing world.
- Our experience of structured learning opportunities is that in many instances they have not met our needs or expectations - they may be too inflexible and stressful, they don't always deliver on fun or personal growth.
- Both formal and informal learning are important but we prefer to learn from other people, from mentors or from practical work or life experience, rather than in classrooms or from books'(Australian National Training Authority, 1999, p3).

Statistically about half the community in Australia is actively learning in both structured and informal settings. The majority are young (under 25 years or between 24 and 44 years) and few sustain the commitment to keep learning throughout the lifespan despite its importance to them (Australian National Training Authority, 1999, p3)

'The perceived or real barriers to learning recognised by the other groups were:

- The competing demands of work and family, including loss of productive time.
- Fear of technology and fear of failure.
- Cost and access.
- Lack of information.
- Perceived irrelevance of learning to life stage'.

(Australian National Training Authority, 1999, p3)

The report also highlighted the value of learning in communities as an important issue. Due to community renewal or rather the preoccupation with the focus on regional, rural and remote Australia the need for local learning products and services does need attention.

The key to learning is interest, being equipped with the necessary literacy skills and the will to exercise the effort required to learn. Indeed we need formal channels for learning through educational institutions or other organisations and we need teachers, educators and people who are enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge.

But there are other means of learning to acquire knowledge. Throughout history self educated men and women from all walks of life and social stations have risen to the occasion of the challenges facing them to name a few - Abraham Lincoln, Ansel Adams, Florence Nightingale, George Bernard Shaw, Charles Dickens and Thomas Edison. The key to learning for these autodidactic people was an insatiable and voracious desire to learn coupled with high motivation and personal drive.

Public Libraries - Lifelong Learning Institutions

Learning is ageless. Learning requires individual and personal motivation. It is necessary to have the will to learn and keep on learning hence attitude and values are critical to its success..

Learning is in fact a lifelong adventure, which can be achieved through formal or informal sources. Learning is not just knowing all the answers or the acquisition of information from a variety of sources or regurgitating the thoughts of others. Nor can examinations and qualifications simply measure it.

The learning process must begin before the child commences school and not cease with retirement or old age.

Studies have shown that 50% of one's potential brain capacity is developed in the first five or six year of life. Therefore there should be a concerted effort to transform those early years into a fun yet powerful and learning growth experience.

Lifelong learning is an all-inclusive philosophy that influences every phase of a public library service.

'Learning is not simply about following accredited courses to obtain qualifications. It is about gaining knowledge to lead better, more fulfilling lives. *Such learning comes frequently in very small quanta. (*Batt, 1998, p4).

The public library is a learning institution, which recognises a wide diversity of clientele. This is evident in its provision of services for all age groups and minority groups.

Through resources, activities and special programs public libraries attempt to develop the minds of young people, to stimulate the adult and continuously engage the older adult.

The public library system is in fact the seat of community lifelong learning - it offers opportunities for individuals and social groups to engage in learning - through leisure and information publications, multi media formats including online sources, formalised programs and /or merely to learn by serendipity through browsing either the library shelves or surfing/navigating the web.

As Chris Batt states 'Public libraries are unique in the way that they can allow those tiny portions of learning to invisibly change people's lives'.

Millions of people pay a king's ransom for college tuition to learn what is free for the taking when motivated by a compelling desire to learn. In the movie Good Will Hunting, Will (played by Matt Damon) chides an arrogant Ivy League student for paying a fortune for an education that would be free but for the price of a library card.

Public libraries have a unique contribution to make to the lifelong learning process - not only on behalf of the informal and independent customer but also acting as an access point to training and learning opportunities provided by others.

This has been demonstrated by the Derbyshire Libraries where the Derbyshire Learning and Technology Access (DELTA) service is available in 20 libraries . Services offered are:

- Internet access
- Information and Learning materials on CD - Rom
- Wordprocessing and spreadsheets

- Video conferencing

According to the article by Martin Doughty the service currently attracts 20,000 users every month. Indeed the success of DELTA assisted the County Council to gain a 400,000 pounds grant to set up a University of Industry pilot, in partnership with Chesterfield College.

This will provide access to online course material through libraries and learning centres around the county and in large mobile libraries.

The success of this project exemplifies how libraries can work together with education as an equal partner 'bringing an independent viewpoint and a range of skills and resources which add value to the County Council's provision of opportunities to learn' (Doughty, 1999, p87)

City of Swan - Lifelong Learning Project

The project developed by the City of Swan Public Libraries was titled - *Lifelong learning - the key to knowledge.*

The City of Swan Libraries consists of 6 public libraries in the City of Swan Western Australia. The libraries serve a population of over 87,000 in an area of accelerating growth namely 5% per annum.

The project was funded by an International Year of Older Person's Grant ($6,000) with additional support in the form of resources, venue and facility/equipment from the City of Swan.

The project consisted of a series of bi-monthly talks on a diverse range of topics and subjects.

The concept of this program was awakened and inspired by personal research for my PhD on the ageing and non ageing Baby Boomers that is the Leading Edge and Trailing Edge Boomers - the group born between 1946-1961.

Overall the Boomers based on the 1996 Census respectively constitute 24% of both the Australian and Western Australian populations.

Of the Leading Edge Boomers in Australia (those born between 1946-1955) 13.2 % of have attained a Higher Degree or Undergraduate or Associate Diploma. Of the Trailing Edge Boomers in Australia (those born between 1956 - 1961) 9.5% have achieved the same levels of education of the Leading Edge group.

These statistics indicate that the Boomers are well educated and will both now and as they age require services to meet their educated interests.

A City of Swan survey, which combined a pilot project/survey of the Baby Boomers, highlighted that 57.8% of the Boomers used the library service for recreation and 32.4% of the Boomers used the service for general interest and formal learning.

In general the literature states that the Boomers are voracious about information, technology and learning and their expectations are high.

Although inspired by the Boomer research the program was developed with all adult community members in mind.

Access to technology and library resources is one avenue in which public libraries can progress lifelong learning within the community. The question however must be asked, 'Do public libraries offer any other services that can complement and enhance the traditional role and services? The answer to this question can only be in the affirmative as public libraries offer Services for Young People, Services for Seniors, Services for Ethnic Community groups, the Aboriginal Community and the Business Sector.

Continuous information programs in the form of a lecture series for adults are another channel to

promote lifelong learning.

Expansion of public library services and partnerships with other service providers or organisations are essential in the future if we as a community institution want to remain relevant and meet community needs. .

The topics and associated lectures in the City of Swan project were selected for all adult ages resulting in a program that did lend itself to intergenerational participation - Baby Boomers, Silent Generation and Generation X.

The anticipated outcomes of the project were:

- Increased knowledge
- Social interaction
- Empowerment and independence
- Mental stimulation
- Development of new skills and awakening of new talents
- Breaking down of generational barriers
- Communal belonging
- Recognition of the value of older persons in our society
- Awareness of public library resources and services

The project was launched on 8 March 1999 by the Minister the Hon Rhonda Parker. The inaugural opening of the lecture series and program commenced on 12 March 1999 and concluded on 24 September 1999.

Although the majority of the lectures were hosted by the Midland Public Library, three other public libraries, namely Altone Park, Ballajura and Guildford Libraries within the system participated in the program. In total eighteen lectures were presented.

The official program, which is included as an Appendix to the paper, was aimed at providing learning opportunities and life skills and all sessions were free.

Many of the speakers were from the University of Western Australia Extension Program and some of the topics addressed were:

- Growing Old Outrageously
- Retiring Gracefully
- Revealing the Mysteries of Forensic Science
- Nutrition: Facts, Lies and Opinions
- Writing an Ordinary Life
- On the Eve of the Last Millennium
- UFOs and the Paranormal

Music also formed part of the lecture series. The local orchestra (Hills Symphony Orchestra) provided a delightful Sunday afternoon Millennium Concert with a guest singer in the Guildford Grammar Chapel a private school in the City of Swan.

The lectures were held on a Friday evening in the Council Chambers at the City of Swan. The City of Swan Council Chambers are located in the Civic Precinct which includes the Midland Public Library. The sessions at the other libraries were conducted in the respective libraries.

741 persons attended the combined sessions and at each session evaluation forms were circulated and later collated and assessed.

Evaluation of the Program

The evaluation forms sought the following information

- Demographic information
- Value of the program
- Awareness of ageing and Seniors
- Overall evaluation of the program
- Effectiveness of promotional material and advertisements

366 evaluation forms were completed however responses were not received to every question.

Demographic Profile

- 37% of the attendees were born outside Australia
- 76% were library members
- 44% resided in the City of Swan
- 55% were aged 54+ and only 28% of the Baby Boomers attended

Value of the Program

- 53.6 % recorded that they had learned new knowledge
- 63% recorded that their knowledge had expanded
- 67% stated that a new interest had been awakened
- 31.6% had gained social interaction
- 14.3% had developed a new skill

Awareness of Ageing and Seniors

- 60% of the attendees stated that the program had made them aware of ageing and seniors
- 40% noted that awareness had not been achieved

Overall Evaluation of the Program

- 93.2% responded that the program had met their expectations
- 94.3% considered the content of the program to be high
- 92.2% considered the presenters to be of a high standard
- 85% found the venue to be of a high standard.

Effectiveness of Promotion and Advertising

- 40% learned of the program through the local newspaper, 38% through the library service and 22% by word of mouth

To address the needs of community members with a disability, a special Reminiscence Theatre program was presented to residents of several nursing homes in the local area. This was a well received event, which awakened many memories through the medium of drama and music.

As a celebration of the lecture series project, a farewell evening was organised where participants and lecturers met in the Council Chambers of the City of Swan for an evening of entertainment, socialisation and refreshments. A singer was engaged for the evening and a performance by a Spanish Dancer and players was in addition offered.

Overall the program was highly successful although the Baby Boomers' attendance was lower than expected. The 54+ age group through their attendance rate demonstrated that they too have a need for lifelong learning.

The project was very demanding of staff time however it did prove to be a valuable learning experience for the staff and an excellent exercise in team effort. Based on the attendance rate and the assessment of the evaluation forms, the lecture program proved to be a very worthwhile project which created heightened awareness of the public library within the community and at the same time contributed to the lifelong learning process.

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APPENDIX

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

LIFE LONG LEARNING -

THE KEY TO KNOWLEDGE

12 March	**Growing Old Outrageously**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Carol O'Brien

26 March	**Writing An Ordinary Life**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Kay Caporn
9 April	**Holidaying In Rural France**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Michael Tassell
19 April	**Growing Old Outrageously**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Carol O'Brien
23 April	**An Introduction To The Bibbulmun Track**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Beckie Shrimpton From The Friends Of The Bibbulmun Track
14 May	**Nutrition: Facts, Lies And Opinions**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Glen Cardwell From The Nutrition Consultants
21 May	**Writing An Ordinary Life**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Kay Caporn
28 May	**Meditation**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Eric Harrison
11 June	**Midlife: Finding Meaning In The Madness**
7.00 pm - 9.00 pm	Presented By Rachel Green

18 June **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**Revealing The Mysteries Of Forensic Science** Presented By Dr Clive Cooke
27 June **3.00 pm - 5.00 pm**	**'A Century Of Music'. A Millennium Concert** Performed By The Hills Orchestra. Guildford Grammar School Chapel
9 July **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**Retiring Gracefully** Presented By Ken Barrett
23 July **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**Falling In Love** Presented By Roz Macnish
13 August **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**UFO's And The Paranormal** Presented By Simon Harvey-Wilson
27 August **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**Numerology** Presented By Stev Slavin
10 September **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**Revealing The Mysteries Of Forensic Science (Midland Public Library)** Presented By Dr Clive Cooke
17 September **7.00 pm - 9.00 pm**	**Revealing The Mysteries Of Forensic Science (Ballajura Public Library)** Presented By Dr Clive Cooke

24 September **On The Eve Of The Last Millennium**

7.00 pm - 9.00 pm Presented by Tim Johnson

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